

## Transportation

**Overview:** *The Transportation section of Chapter 3 includes evaluation of:*

- *transportation management strategies;*
- *bicycle planning issues;*
- *transit service improvement and funding issues;*
- *pedestrian environment and designations;*
- *Northgate-specific parking requirements*
- *traffic growth data;*
- *arterial traffic circulation issues;*
- *neighborhood traffic control issues; and*
- *the status of planning for a light rail station at Northgate.*

### SUMMARY OF TRANSPORTATION VISION

The Background and Context section at the beginning of the Northgate Plan (page 3) discusses the Northgate Plan's vision as it relates to transportation. The Northgate Plan policies and guidelines respond to the major concern that traffic congestion will continue to increase beyond the capacity of the street system and make the area less attractive for shoppers, visitors and residents. A related concern is that congestion will increase the amount of through traffic spilling into nearby residential areas and local streets, with associated traffic and pedestrian safety impacts. The Northgate Plan notes that expansion of the street system to provide additional vehicular capacity is an ineffective and undesirable way to reduce congestion.

The Northgate Plan seeks to create a balance between the vehicular and pedestrian modes of transportation in the core area, discourage single-occupant vehicle traffic, increase transit access and service within nearby neighborhoods, and accommodate more growth in person-trips (through pedestrian, bicycle and transit modes) than vehicle trips. This would help traffic continue to flow, even with projected residential and commercial growth in the area. To achieve this, the Northgate Plan recognizes that it will be necessary to provide a more accessible pedestrian system with better connections between the core and surrounding neighborhoods, and an environment better suited to pedestrian activity. These objectives interrelate with the land use objectives of the Northgate Plan. The Northgate Plan assumes that a regional high-capacity transit system ultimately will be constructed with a station located within the Northgate core area. The Northgate Plan assumes that more people will choose to use transit systems if they are accessible, timely and safe.

Based on the transportation vision, the Northgate Plan lists six policies addressing transportation topics:

Policy 6: Accommodate more person trips than vehicle trips

Policy 7: Transit

Policy 8: Pedestrians

Policy 9: Parking

Policy 10: Vehicular Circulation

Policy 11: High Capacity Transit Station.

There are three to six implementation guidelines under each of these policies, some of which contain multiple sub-sections listing desired improvements, and some of which establish regulatory requirements. The policies and implementation guidelines are summarized in the evaluation of each policy below.

#### **SUMMARY OF CITIZEN COMMENTS ON TRANSPORTATION POLICIES**

The following is an abbreviated summary of citizen comments related to Policies 6 through 11.

**Policy 6 – Reduction of Vehicle Trips**

- Adequate staffing and funding for TMP monitoring/enforcement.
- Does the Mall have a TMP?
- Analyze performance of existing TMPs.
- Evaluate bicycle planning status.
- Clarify the status of bicycle route designations.

**Policy 7 – Transit**

Citizen comments express interest in:

- receiving the transit service improvements as originally discussed in the Northgate Plan (pages 24-30), especially to increase east-west access;
- a status report and analysis of progress in transit service;
- discussion of HOV lane improvement status;
- discussion of circulator buses; and
- what happens if the light rail system is not provided at Northgate?

**Policy 8 – Pedestrians**

Citizens indicate significant concerns regarding implementation of the pedestrian policy and guidelines. Interests include:

- perceived omissions or deficiencies in the Plan's pedestrian policy and guidelines (including allowing non-conforming conditions to remain);
- amending requirements such as sidewalk widths to improve pedestrian environments;
- extending certain street designations to additional streets (1<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE, NE 100<sup>th</sup> & 103<sup>rd</sup> Sts. et al).
- resolving inconsistencies between the Northgate Plan's mapping of designations and the versions adopted into the Land Use Code;
- perceived conflicts in the Northgate Plan of seeking pedestrian orientation as well as accommodating automobile traffic flow;
- an urban trail within the Northgate Mall GDP;
- promoting achievement of Green Streets (see the Open Space section of this review).
- completing the sidewalk system where not currently continuous (such as segments of NE 100<sup>th</sup> St. and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE).

**Policy 9 - Parking**

Citizen comments express interest in:

- whether the parking requirements make sense and are being enforced;
- the conflicts of accommodating parking while seeking greater transit and pedestrian use; and
- funding issues, and the lack of need for a public parking garage project as described in the Northgate Plan (I.G. 9.5).

**Policy 10 – Vehicular Circulation**

Traffic-related impacts on arterials, neighborhood streets, and traffic's relationship to livability, pedestrian qualities and safety continue to be the issue of greatest overall public concern. There is extensive public interest in this topic, including (but not limited to) the following range of concerns:

- traffic impacts of the Northgate Mall GDP and Touchstone development on arterial flows, circulation, and neighborhood streets;
- improving neighborhood traffic controls to prevent impacts from commercial-oriented pass-through traffic (including use of SEPA authority);
- dealing with existing & future traffic congestion;
- moving toward decreased reliance on automobiles, and increased transit availability;
- perceived conflicts in accommodating automobile traffic while promoting transit and pedestrian objectives;
- the City permission of extra curb cuts on Major Pedestrian Streets;
- enforcement of left-turn prohibition guideline;
- provision of pedestrian crossings and other street improvements requested in the Northgate Plan

**Policy 11 – High Capacity Transit Station**

Citizen comments express interest in:

- how the Northgate Plan should be changed to better encourage and/or require concentration of development for transit purposes;
- the status of light-rail plans for Northgate;
- what happens if the light-rail system is not built to Northgate, and how that would affect provision of pedestrian and transit accessibility improvements.

## DISCUSSION OF TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

This section discusses progress in terms of transportation topics described in the Northgate Plan (Policies 6 through 11), including: the status of regulatory vehicle trip reduction efforts; accessibility and timeliness of transit service; provision of sidewalks and bicycle lanes; trends in parking provision; traffic volumes and congestion on the road network; provision of neighborhood traffic controls; and status of high-capacity transit facilities.

### **Policy 6 – Transportation Management Programs, Vehicle Trip Reduction, and Bicycle Planning**

#### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 6 states, *“The efficiency of the transportation system shall be maximized by accommodating more person trips rather than vehicle trips.”* The four implementation guidelines under this policy:

- require Transportation Management Programs (TMPs) for new development forecast to generate 25 or more employee or student vehicle trips in the PM peak hour;
- strongly encourage a Northgate Area transportation management association;
- promote a safe and convenient environment for bicycling; and
- monitor vehicle trip reduction in the Northgate area.

The Northgate Overlay District has a lower threshold for requiring TMPs than other parts of the City, because it ties TMP requirements to new development (that would generate 25 or more peak hour vehicle trips) rather than just larger employers. This means more locations in Northgate will ultimately be covered by TMPs, as new development occurs.

#### **Actions to Date**

##### ***Transportation Management Programs and Vehicle Trip Reduction***

The TMP requirements in this section of the Northgate Plan have been incorporated into Land Use Code requirements and are applicable to most new substantial development. Review of DCLU decisions indicates that TMPs are being required for substantial development projects, as intended by the Northgate Plan.

As part of an evaluation of major institution master plans, DCLU staff evaluated how TMPs were working for North Seattle Community College (NSCC) and Northwest Hospital. At NSCC in 1997-98, the reported use of transportation modes other than single-occupant vehicles (SOV) by employees was 34 percent, which is better than the 32 percent non-SOV goal in their TMP. This means that approximately one-third of the NSCC employees used carpools, transit, bicycling or other non-SOV transportation modes. NSCC provides discounted bus passes to employees and students, and carpooling is subsidized. Remaining transportation issues at NSCC include reducing the amount of school-generated parking activity in the surrounding neighborhood streets (a residential parking zone will soon be implemented in this vicinity).

At Northwest Hospital, the 1992 TMP had a goal that 35 percent of its employees commuting in morning hours should use transportation modes other than single-occupant vehicles. Actual performance between 1996 and 1999 was: 40 percent by other modes in 1996 and 1997 (exceeding the goal), 26 percent and 23 percent in 1998 and 1999, respectively (falling short of the goal). Northwest Hospital partially funds a METRO shuttle bus route that connects with the Northgate Transit Center, and encourages carpooling, transit, bicycling, telecommuting and other strategies for reducing commute trips. The hospital will soon be requiring parking fees for employees and patients, which is stimulating greater participation in transit and carpooling programs. Also, the City has changed on-street parking restrictions in surrounding neighborhoods to limit parking to two hours, to discourage parking in these areas.

### ***Bicycle Planning***

Since Northgate Plan adoption, the Northgate Mall GDP was conditioned to provide bicycle lanes on the north and south sides of NE 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, to be provided in the next few years. The Northwest Federal Credit Union building at N. 112<sup>th</sup> St./Meridian Avenue N. provided a bicycle storage area, showers and lockers, Walgreen's provided a bicycle rack, and the Windermere Realty building provided weather-protected bicycle parking spaces and bicycle lockers. SEATRAN identified NE 90<sup>th</sup> Street from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE to 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE as a "residential street commonly used by bicyclists" on its Bicycling Guide Map.

### **Discussion**

#### ***TMPs and Vehicle Trip Reduction (I.G. 6.1 and 6.4)***

##### ***Administration and Enforcement***

- City staff comments suggest that the organizational structure of TMP administration is an important issue. DCLU requires new TMPs for many larger projects, and also enforces TMP requirements (along with its other code enforcement duties). SEATRAN helps negotiate TMP contents and provides some monitoring functions. The separation of TMP responsibilities between DCLU and SEATRAN appears to decrease the effectiveness of TMP administration, because responsibility and accountability for the "mission" is divided. The division of responsibilities creates a gap between the monitoring (identifying who is non-compliant with TMPs) and enforcement (taking action to remedy the non-compliance) functions. Very few enforcement actions are taken to address TMP violations.
- SEATRAN has not had adequate funding and staffing for the TMP-related functions it provides. Only a portion of one employee's time in SEATRAN is allocated for TMP-related duties (there are now roughly 200 TMPs in the city). Much of this employee's time is spent negotiating conditions for new TMPs, allowing very little time for site inspections and monitoring of TMP performance. To increase SEATRAN's effectiveness in TMP administration and monitoring, additional funded staffing is needed.
- City staff comments also indicate that TMP administration would benefit from additional information technology to effectively manage TMP-related information

and aid in monitoring functions. Development of a database would help organize the amount of information generated by increasing numbers of TMPs.

Without improved administration and enforcement, progress toward trip reduction objectives of the Northgate Plan will be constrained. This review recommends additional analysis to explore the feasibility of changes in TMP administration, to increase overall effectiveness in trip reduction efforts.

### *Encouraging More Participation*

To promote the trip reduction objectives of the Northgate Plan, attracting further participation in existing incentive-based programs may be more effective than only focusing on TMP enforcement. Programs are already available for this purpose. Staff at King County METRO's Market Development Group have described several "products" that developers and employers can implement to promote lower-cost commuting options (such as FlexPass), and concepts that can be applied to residents of transit-oriented development, shoppers, and small businesses (see Table 3-2). METRO staff can assist businesses that are interested in participating in these programs. City staff are already promoting these programs in other neighborhoods, and plan to do so in Northgate, during Station Area Planning (2000) and Parking Management (2001) planning efforts.

**Table 3-2**

**Summary of Transit Ridership Incentive Types Provided by King County METRO**

<b>Incentive Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>FlexPass</i>	Discounted bus/transit pass program. Employer obtains Flex-Passes for all employees, but price is calculated according to the number of existing transit users in the company. This results in significant cost savings in the purchase of passes and increased ridership. Employer's cost responsibility goes up over time with ridership growth. For additional fees, County can provide "Home Free Guaranteed" and vanpool subsidy features.
<i>Commuter Bonus &amp; Commuter Bonus Plus</i> vouchers	Employees are given <i>Commuter Bonus</i> vouchers in any denomination that can be used to pay for bus passes or vanpool costs. <i>Commuter Bonus Plus</i> vouchers can be used at participating retailers to purchase items that could facilitate bike, walk, carpool and telecommuting (such as shoes, bicycles, internet service, etc.).
Car-sharing – <i>FlexCar</i> (City-County prog. w/private sector)	Individuals or businesses through a membership can rent cars in their neighborhood on a per hour/per mile rate.
Customer-oriented incentives	Concepts include: holding frequent transportation fairs; prize drawings for alternative transportation users; tickets for free bus ride home; holiday neighborhood shuttle service; adding bus trips during holiday shopping seasons, parcel delivery service after purchase. Some of these concepts have been used recently at University Village.
TOD-resident incentives	At King County transit-oriented development projects, King County sells discounted bus passes to the developer to give to new residents to increase transit use.

Source: King County METRO, Transit Market Development Group, 2000.

### *Transportation Management Association (I.G. 6.2)*

A Transportation Management Association (TMA) known as the “Northgate Employer Network” meets monthly, assisted by King County METRO staff. Participants include representatives from Northwest Hospital, the Washington Dental building, Nordstrom, Northgate Mall, Seattle City Light and other companies. The group helps coordinate carpooling and transit programs, sponsors commute-reduction campaigns, and participates in discussions of regulatory and legislative issues. Individual participants in the Northgate Employer Network successfully advocated for establishment of the METRO Route 318 shuttle service that links Northwest Hospital and North Seattle Community College (and other locations) to the Northgate Transit Center. These activities are consistent with the activities described in the Northgate Plan. However, the Northgate Employer Network has not proceeded with more intensive cooperative efforts mentioned in the Northgate Plan, such as providing a central clearinghouse for transit information and services, group monitoring of each member’s progress toward performance goals, or strongly exerting influence on transit or street improvement decisions.

### *Bicycle Planning (I.G. 6.3)*

Figure 4 of the Northgate Plan included representations of Key Bicycle Streets based on the 1984 Seattle Comprehensive Transportation Plan (SCTP) and a desired bicycle route (identified on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE). In the SCTP, a “Key Bicycle Street” was an unsigned route suitable for bicycles, with a widened curb lane where possible; it was the fourth-level bicycle classification, following bicycle paths, lanes, and routes.

Figure 4 of the Northgate Plan did not distinguish existing Key Bicycle Streets from other streets intended to be added to that designation by the Northgate Plan. The following summarizes the relationship of Figure 4 to the actual designations in the 1984 SCTP:

#### Correctly Shown

- Key Bicycle Street on Wallingford Avenue/College Way/Meridian Avenue N.;
- Key Bicycle Street on N. 92<sup>nd</sup> Street west of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE;

#### Incorrectly Omitted

- Key Bicycle Streets on Northgate Way, 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Lake City Way and NE 125<sup>th</sup>/130<sup>th</sup> Streets;

#### New Key Bicycle Streets with Northgate Plan

- Numerous, including portions of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Roosevelt Way NE, and east-west route including NE 100<sup>th</sup> Street.

The intended new Key Bicycle Streets were not sufficiently distinguished in the text of the Northgate Plan, nor in Figure 4, for the reader to understand. These locations were described, however, in Resolution 28753, a resolution that adopted revisions to the Transit and Bicycle Classifications Maps of the SCTP.

The City's current terminology distinguishes four conditions: bicycle trails (primarily the Burke-Gilman Trail); bicycle lanes (designated bicycle lane areas such as those near Green Lake); and two street categories, arterials and residential streets "commonly used by bicycles." The street categories are not associated with specific facilities for bicycle use, and so do not mean that bicycle lanes, trails or signage will be provided on those routes.

The graphical weaknesses of Figure 4 and changes in terminology generate confusion, but two conclusions are possible:

- the City's 1984 SCTP map recognized 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE as a street suitable for bicycle use (with no commitment to improvements), but SEATLAN's current bicycle planning documentation does not; and
- the Northgate Plan (I.G. 6.3.A) indicates that 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE shall be considered for bicycle lanes, wide curb lanes, or signed routes [page 22].

SEATLAN's recent bicycle planning efforts have not considered funding for bicycle-oriented improvements on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Despite the guideline in the Northgate Plan, it appears that SEATLAN was not obligated to officially list this improvement as a project eligible for funding.

Even if the requested streets had been designated by SEATLAN for bicycle improvements, funding would have been unlikely. Notable facts are:

- Funding exclusively devoted to on-street bicycle improvements is very limited and primarily devoted to spot improvements.
- For some road improvement projects, bicycle-related improvements can be worked into the projects, especially if they increase the project's eligibility for grant funding.
- Transportation Figure 5 of the City's Comprehensive Plan shows numerous other streets throughout the city that were planned to be provided as of 1994, but required funding.
- Bicycle lane improvements have also been requested in several neighborhood plans, generating even more demand for limited funding.

SEATLAN has prepared a "bicycle needs inventory" map showing locations of funded and other possible bicycle-related improvements. The physical feasibility of improvements in some mapped locations has not been determined yet. The list of improvement projects was derived from neighborhood plans, the Transportation Strategic Plan, the City's Comprehensive Plan, and recommendations from an advisory board. SEATLAN staff did not review the Northgate Plan as part of this process, but in early 2000 did revisit 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to examine physical conditions as they relate to potential bicycle improvements.

SEATLAN staff's current bicycle planning objectives in the Northgate area are briefly summarized as: facilitating access to/from the future light rail station and the Mall vicinity; and creating viable east-west routes that cross I-5. To support these objectives, future possible bicycle facility projects would include:

1. bike lanes on both sides of 1st Avenue NE from NE 92nd to NE 103rd Street;



2. installing bike lanes on NE 103rd St. from 1st Ave. NE to 5th Ave. NE (would be provided with GDP-related construction);
3. constructing an overpass or underpass across I-5 near NSCC; and
4. install a bicycle/pedestrian ramp at NE 117th St. (just east of I-5) to bypass existing stairs.

Funding still needs to be identified for projects 1, 3, and 4 above.

### **SPO Recommendations**

- **Analyze the feasibility of reorganizing the TMP administrative structure, to improve monitoring and enforcement functions and better achieve trip reduction objectives.**

Reorganizing TMP administration has budget and staffing implications that need to be explored before this change could occur.

- **Consider funding additional SEATRAN staffing to address TMP-related duties.**
- **Pursue increased voluntary participation in incentive-based trip reduction programs.**

City staff are involved in promotion of existing employer-oriented transit options, such as FlexPass, as part of other planning efforts. City staff, perhaps in DON, could also play coordinating and facilitating roles that would help connect existing businesses with METRO to initiate these programs.

- **Review the Northgate Plan's request for bicycle improvements on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and include this project on the Bicycle Needs Inventory map.**
- **In locations where physically feasible and safe, consider future funding of improvements such as signage, wide curb lanes or bicycle lanes.**
- **Correct Figure 4 of the Northgate Plan to accurately show the 1984 SCTP Key Bicycle Street designations and additional designations that were added by the Northgate Plan.**

## **Policy 7 – Transit**

### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 7 states, “*Enhance transit service and facilities to make it a more attractive travel mode for persons living and working in the Northgate area.*” The six implementation guidelines discuss:

- increasing transit service to the Northgate Transit Center from surrounding neighborhoods and major destinations;
- expanding high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities;
- encouraging enhanced transit accessibility;
- centralizing Park and Ride lots;
- providing additional bus shelters; and
- increasing the number of designated Transit Streets.

I.G. 7.1.B says that the City should advocate for more east-west transit service along Northgate Way, NE 125<sup>th</sup> Street, and portions of N. 92<sup>nd</sup> Street and N. 115<sup>th</sup> Street. I.G. 11.3 also indicates that the future high-capacity transit station should have “feeder” service available to all residents within two miles of the station, with 30-minute headways or less and routes within ¼ mile of residents’ homes. Other text in the Northgate Plan (sidebar on page 26) indicates a desire for better connections and more timely service between Northgate and the broader range of north-end neighborhoods.

### **Actions to Date**

Transit service within the Northgate planning area has increased since 1993. King County METRO staff indicate that during the implementation of their Six-Year Transit Plan (since 1995), annual “platform hours” of service expended on Northgate Transit Center-related routes increased by approximately 80,000 hours out of nearly 160,000 new hours in the North King County subarea (includes north Seattle, Shoreline and Lake Forest Park). According to King County METRO staff, the hours were spent on new service, headway and reliability improvements; several of the improvements meet or exceed those requested in the Northgate Plan, but some other requests have not been fulfilled (see Table 3-3 in the Discussion below, and Appendix E for METRO responses).

City staff have advocated for METRO to provide additional east-west transit service. SEATRAN and SPO staff regularly coordinate with METRO staff to seek better service. METRO also seeks public input for service changes through rider surveys and other methods. One example of east-west service improvement was the shifting of Route 75 to run east-west on Northgate Way.

Some routing decisions by METRO provided alternative service improvements to those requested in the Northgate Plan. For example, the Northgate Plan suggested that the downtown-oriented Route 69 operate on Roosevelt Way NE in Maple Leaf. Instead, Route 66 was implemented on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Route 68 was left on Roosevelt Way NE, providing north-south rather than east-west oriented service. The Northgate Plan suggested that Route 68 be shifted to 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Ravenna Avenue NE and Lake

City Way. This change was not implemented by METRO, but the service level on Route 68 was improved to 30-minute headways in September 1998. METRO preferred routing on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE rather than Roosevelt Way NE to reach the Northgate Transit Center; the latter route option was perceived by METRO to add delays due to more turning movements and traffic congestion on Northgate Way.

### ***Implications of I-695***

The approval of I-695 in November 1999 has major implications for King County METRO transit funding that will affect Northgate transit service. King County's projected loss of \$50 million in transit operating budget for the year 2000 may result in worst-case cuts of up to one-third of METRO services (1.1 million hours out of 3.3 million hour of service for 2000-2001). The State Legislature could provide additional funding that would avoid some of these cuts, but this has not been resolved. Transit service in Seattle may decline by up to 32 percent (approximately 600,000 hours of service) or even more depending upon County decisions. Among the contemplated cuts is METRO Route 318, the shuttle connecting Northwest Hospital, NSCC, and other locations with the Northgate Transit Center. Other contemplated reductions for September 2000 (if other revenues do not become available) include:

- the I-5 segments of Routes 317 and 377 to/from downtown in peak commuting periods;
- Route 315;
- evening and weekend service on Routes 302, 317 and 377;
- Route 75 west of the Transit Center, connecting to NSCC, Oak Tree and Ballard;
- Route 75 east of the Transit Center, after 10 PM;
- Route 16, after 10 PM.

The METRO funding cuts would make further service improvements to Maple Leaf difficult to achieve, unless funding is restored in the future. See Appendix E for further documentation of potential service cuts, as summarized by METRO staff.

### ***HOV Lane Improvements***

A northbound I-5 on-ramp including an HOV lane has been constructed at NE 107<sup>th</sup> Street. This improvement altered traffic patterns such that northbound traffic on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE does not have to pass through the intersection of Northgate Way/1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE, which eased traffic congestion at that intersection.

### ***Shuttle Service***

Northwest Hospital and North Seattle Community College provide partial funding for Route 318, a transit van service connecting to the Northgate Transit Center. This route also connects to the Four Freedoms senior housing complex in Bitter Lake. METRO funding cuts and impending expiration of federal funds may result in loss of this service.

### ***Centralization of Park and Ride Lots***

Early planning with the City, METRO and private landowners has taken place to develop new parking facilities in the Mall's south lot.

## **Discussion**

### ***Transit Service Improvement and Funding Issues (I.G. 7.1)***

The service improvements provided to the Northgate area have contributed to partial achievement of the Northgate Plan's transit objectives, in that more transit service is available, service is more frequent through longer periods of the day and week, and connections to more areas are possible than in 1992 and 1993. Table 3-3 (on next page) interprets the approximate degree to which current transit service meets the requests in the Northgate Plan [see page 25 of the Plan]. Despite this progress, some of the Northgate Plan's transit service objectives are not yet met.

The unsatisfied transit objectives of the Northgate Plan primarily consist of bus route changes or increased service that would better connect surrounding neighborhoods to the Northgate Transit Center (refer to I.G. 7.1 in the Northgate Plan). Most of the existing routes are north-south oriented; east-west access through the Maple Leaf neighborhood is provided only on NE 80<sup>th</sup> Street and Northgate Way. This affects the ease of accessibility to the Transit Center for some residents east of the Northgate core (although Route 68 does provide 30-minute headway service between Roosevelt Way and the Transit Center, and Routes 66 and 67 provide better than 15-minute headway service via 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE).

The recommendations in the Northgate Plan could translate to a variety of possible transit system improvements, such as increased frequency of service on existing routes, changing portions of existing routes to better connect to the Transit Center, and/or new bus or van service on additional streets. METRO funding constraints (even without considering recent I-695 funding issues) mean that tradeoffs are necessary: providing service on new streets would occur at the expense of increasing service frequency on existing routes. Of these options, METRO staff tend to prefer improving service frequency on existing routes, rather than creating new routes. More frequent service reduces riders' dependence on 30-minute or 60-minute schedules. METRO staff's preferences imply that future transit service improvements are more likely to occur along streets already used by transit routes, rather than creating bus or van circulator routes that might use smaller arterials or local streets. METRO staff indicate one possible route alteration to increase east-west accessibility would be to redirect Route 73 (15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE service) to connect with the Northgate Transit Center via Northgate Way, rather than terminating at NE 145<sup>th</sup> Street. This would provide better east-west connection for residents within ¼ mile of 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

**Table 3-3**  
**Transit Service Responsiveness to Requests in Northgate Plan**

<b>METRO Route</b>	<b>SPO Interpretation of Status</b>	
	<b>Service Frequency Request</b>	<b>Routing Request</b>
5	Weekday headway better than requested in Plan; Sunday service not provided (due to budget).	--
16	Better than requested in Plan.	Not provided (due to rider opposition).
62	Achieved, except for Sunday service (62 absorbed into Route 75).	Achieved
65	Better than requested in Plan.	Not achieved.
67	Better than requested in Plan.	--
68	Achieved.	Not achieved (due to rider opposition).
69	Approximately same as requested in Plan, but in different location.	Roosevelt Way not served by this route (instead on 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue NE).
73	Approximately same as requested in Plan.	Not provided (primarily due to rider opposition). Restructure will be considered when light rail implemented.
75	--	Route shifted to Northgate Way and Transit Center.
302/305	Partially satisfies requests in Plan.	Various changes partially satisfy requests in Plan.
307	Partially satisfies requests in Plan.	--
315	Additional service not anticipated by Plan.	Additional service not anticipated by Plan.
317	Partially satisfies requests in Plan.	Changes under consideration.
318	Additional service not anticipated by Plan.	Additional service not anticipated by Plan.
360	Route replaced by more service on another Aurora-oriented route.	Not achieved (due to budget, and better service concept, according to METRO). Connections from Aurora Ave. to Northgate Transit Center provided by Routes 5, 75, 302, 315, 317, 318.
377	Partially satisfies requests in Plan.	Various changes partially satisfy requests in Plan.

Source: SPO, 2000, based on written comments by King County METRO staff, 1999.

In 2000, King County METRO will be preparing a new Six-Year Plan update that will guide near-term transit changes. Community members and City representatives should participate in the planning outreach process for METRO's plan to promote the transit service and facility objectives of the Northgate Plan.

Sound Transit will provide one new bus express route (505) this year, connecting the Northgate Transit Center with Lynnwood and Everett. Depending on choice of routing alternatives, Sound Transit express route 522 connecting the Northgate Transit Center to Bothell and Woodinville may also be provided in 2001 or 2002. Another future express route may provide service between Northgate, Bellevue and Issaquah.

### ***Effects of Light-Rail System on Bus Service***

Implementation of a light rail system reaching Northgate would further solidify the area's status as a major transit destination, and could free up buses for additional service to neighborhoods. If this occurs, METRO may be able to provide better east-west transit connections and accessibility to the Northgate Transit Center. However, this cannot be assured at this time, due to uncertainties in predicting future funding. The rail system would also likely result in elimination of some express bus service that mimics rail-level service.

### ***Circulator Buses***

Smaller circulator buses conceptually would fit in with the existing street environment (fewer arterials, more local streets) and could provide more direct east-west transit service between the Maple Leaf neighborhood and the Northgate Transit Center than full-size buses could provide. METRO staff indicate that small-scale circulator bus/van routes on local streets are not very cost-effective and attract fewer riders than routes that serve multiple activity centers and have demand for ridership in both directions.

Transit funding constraints and service efficiency are expected to remain significant barriers to implementing widespread circulator bus service in Northgate. For example, a federal operating grant (approximately \$175,000) for METRO Route 318 expires in September 2000 and King County's funding contribution (\$50,000) is in jeopardy due to I-695 funding cuts. NSCC and Northwest Hospital also provide partial funding (totaling approximately \$125,000), which would be lost if the route were canceled. So far, the City has agreed with King County METRO that higher ridership bus routes should be prioritized for funding over smaller, lower-ridership routes. Since Route 318 has relatively low ridership, advocating for retention of this route is at odds with the current funding prioritization approach.

Despite the current transit funding prioritization approach, the amenity value of having an existing circulator route and the benefits it provides to the community should be acknowledged. Route 318 represents a partial fulfillment of an objective of the Northgate Plan. Senior citizens, NSCC students, Northwest Hospital employees and others benefit from the level of transit service provided by Route 318. If continued operation is important to the community, then institutions, businesses and residents need to work with METRO and the City to identify alternative funding approaches.

Over the long-term, it is possible that construction and successful operation of a high-capacity transit station at the Northgate Transit Center would help spur interest in funding an expanded circulator bus system and interest in public ridership of circulator buses. Given that assumption and recognition of the current funding constraints, an expanded circulator bus system may be best seen as an item for long-term rather than short-term implementation.

***Shuttle Service (I.G. 7.3)***

The Northgate Plan encouraged Northgate employers, possibly through a TMA, to jointly provide private shuttle service to transit centers, particularly for substantial development more than ¼ mile from transit. This service has not been provided by Northgate employers to date. However, METRO Route 318 fulfills this purpose for Northwest Hospital and North Seattle Community College.

Essentially all commercially zoned land in the planning area is within ¼ mile of a transit route stop (e.g., any bus stop), and so I.G. 7.3 is unlikely to directly lead to a requirement of future private shuttle service. Shuttle service could still be promoted by City staff as a way for current and future new employers to facilitate greater transit use.

***HOV Lane Improvements (I.G. 7.2)***

The Northgate Plan stated that the City shall work with METRO and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to analyze the feasibility of HOV lane improvements including: A) transit-only lane on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE and Northgate Way to access the southbound I-5 on-ramp; B) a transit queue jump lane at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Northgate Way; C) a northbound I-5 on-ramp HOV lane at NE 107<sup>th</sup> Street; and D) a pedestrian crossing between the Northgate Transit Center and North Seattle Community College. A queue jump lane is a transit-only lane that helps buses avoid being caught in queues for turning movements at intersections.

Improvements A and B have not been analyzed or funded, but feasibility analysis could be pursued by City staff in the future. However, this sort of improvement is not likely to be a high funding priority for METRO or WSDOT in the near future, given capital and operating budget constraints and other regional system improvement needs. The value of Improvement A would be to facilitate downtown-bound bus routes from the Northgate Transit Center at times when the express lanes run northbound. Starting in June 2000, routing of southbound afternoon trips on Routes 41 and 307 will shift to access I-5 at Northgate Way (4 trips per hour). Rather than on-street transit-only lanes on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE, METRO staff suggest that an HOV queue bypass lane on the southbound on-ramp could be worthwhile. The value of Improvement B would be to facilitate left turn movements that would aid service between areas to the east and the Northgate Transit Center. This improvement appears to be hindered by a shortage of right-of-way width to accommodate this type of lane at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way intersection.

Improvement C has occurred. Improvement D, the I-5 pedestrian crossing, is most likely to occur in coordination with Sound Transit construction of a light rail station at Northgate. Some citizens prefer an underpass rather than an overpass for the I-5 pedestrian crossing.

***Centralization of Park and Ride lots (I.G. 7.4)***

The Northgate Plan recommended locating all park-and-ride activity at or within 800 feet of the Northgate Transit Center. Significant planning has occurred to implement this guideline. Early planning with the City, METRO and private landowners has taken place to develop new parking facilities in the Mall's south lot. New garages on the south lot of the mall property (if GDP-related development proceeds) could accommodate approximately 1,000 transit-related parking spaces supplementing the existing Transit Center parking, and replacing the existing park-and-ride lot capacity (approximately 500 spaces) at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE facility. The existing facility at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE would be converted to other public uses. More planning, coordination and negotiation will be necessary to implement planned changes. The expected timeframe for these changes to occur, if necessary agreements are reached, is within the next 5-7 years.

**SPO Recommendations**

- **Facilitate additional communication between citizens, City staff and METRO staff as a way for the public to further influence future transit service decisions. Seek future service and routing improvements consistent with the intent of the Northgate Plan.**
- **Investigate the feasibility of “neighborhood feeder” transit service to further improve transit access of north end neighborhoods to and from the Northgate core. This is occurring as part of the Intermediate Capacity Transit study being conducted by the City and King County METRO. Advocate for additional neighborhood feeder transit service, especially if and when light rail or other high-capacity transit service is available at the Northgate Transit Center.**
- **Seek options to continue METRO Route 318 service, which could be canceled due to transit funding cuts.**
- **Examine the feasibility of funding expanded METRO Route 318 service to additional neighborhood areas, to provide more direct transit connections to/from the Northgate Transit Center.**
- **Evaluate the feasibility of HOV lane improvements suggested in the Northgate Plan.**



## **Policy 8 – Pedestrians**

### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 8 states, *“Increase pedestrian circulation with an improved street level environment by creating pedestrian connections that are safe, interesting, and pleasant.”*

The six implementation guidelines discuss:

- the pedestrian circulation system;
- designating pedestrian streets;
- reducing pedestrian/vehicular conflicts;
- developing Green Streets;
- designating Wallingford Avenue/College Way/Meridian Avenue as a “Class III” boulevard; and
- designating Special Landscaped Arterials.

Figure 8 on page 32 of the Northgate Plan illustrates pedestrian and street designations for several streets in the planning area, including Major Pedestrian Streets, Special Landscaped Arterials, Class III Boulevard, Street Parks II and III, an Urban Trail and Grade Separated Pedestrian Crossings. The central portions of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Northgate Way in the commercial core were designated as Major Pedestrian Streets, to denote their importance as major links in the pedestrian network, and the need for a superior pedestrian environment.

### **Actions to Date**

#### ***Improvements Since Plan Adoption***

The City and private developers have provided some pedestrian improvements since Northgate Plan adoption. Of six priority locations identified in the Northgate Plan for pedestrian crossing improvements, two were provided: a signalized intersection at NE 112<sup>th</sup> Street/Roosevelt Way (as part of the QFC development), and a pedestrian signal at Meridian Avenue N./N. 105<sup>th</sup> Street in 1995. A new pedestrian signal was also installed at NE 95<sup>th</sup> Street/Roosevelt Way, to assist elementary school children in crossing Roosevelt Way.

New private development provided a modest amount of new pedestrian-oriented design features, in scattered locations. The QFC site includes pedestrian walkways from Northgate Way, Roosevelt Way and NE 112<sup>th</sup> Street, and provided sidewalk improvements at entrances on these streets (as well as improved frontage sidewalks along NE 112<sup>th</sup> Street). The Men’s Wearhouse provided benches, weather protection and modest “urban garden” improvements (benches, and landscaping in planter boxes) along its major street frontages. Walgreen’s included two benches, wider sidewalks, weather protection, limited landscaping, and a small area of brick pavers at the automobile curb cut. The Northwest Federal Credit Union provided a plaza with several benches and landscaping near the street frontage on Meridian Avenue N. The Windermere Realty building provided 8-foot sidewalks with street trees on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE. Some of

**Men's Wearhouse south façade and sidewalk amenities, along Northgate Way.**

**Men's Wearhouse west façade and sidewalk amenities, along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.**

these improvements were provided as usable open space, but also have the effect of enhancing pedestrian opportunities and streetscape aesthetics.

Between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE on Northgate Way, and NE 105<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> Streets on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, there is approximately 8,400 linear feet of Major Pedestrian Street frontage, counting both sides of the streets. Of this amount, development has occurred on only 425 linear feet of these streets (5% of total frontage), for the Walgreen's and Men's Wearhouse developments. However, the under-construction Touchstone development accounts for an additional 900 linear feet and the planned Mall GDP development another 1,900 linear feet of street frontage that will be developed according to major pedestrian street requirements (with the exception of an exit-only curb cut to Northgate Way for ADA-accessible vehicles from the Touchstone site). This accounts for approximately 40 percent of the designated major pedestrian street frontage.

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Pedestrian Streets (I.G. 8.1 and 8.2)***

Given the size and central location of the Northgate Mall property, improvements associated with the Mall GDP would be important elements in the area's pedestrian network. The Mall GDP proposal includes several improvements that would enhance overall pedestrian accessibility and the street-level environment. Public plazas, street level commercial uses, an overpass connection from the Mall to the south lot, and increased pedestrian accessibility through the south lot would provide a more interesting and accessible pedestrian environment. East-west access would be accommodated by pedestrian areas in the west half of the south lot, and also sidewalks along NE 100<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Streets. In Phase III of development (within 5 to 12 years), new pedestrian walkways with marked crossings, lighting and landscaping would be provided within the main mall parking lots. In Phase IV of development (within 10 to 15 years), development in the northeast portion of the Mall property would improve the street-level environment along Northgate Way and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

DCLU evaluated the Mall GDP as meeting the intent of Policy 8. GDP-related development would improve overall pedestrian accessibility and streetscape quality compared to existing conditions, generally in the spirit of the Northgate Plan's objectives. Potentially, the Mall GDP could have provided even more pedestrian-oriented features than are proposed, such as additional plazas, a more fine-grained land use pattern, and an even greater emphasis on pedestrian walkways through the site. Several citizens advocated for more pedestrian improvements within the south lot, including a trail with a more natural character angling through the site, along with a daylighted creek feature. The Mall owners chose not to include this concept within their plans, and the City could not require this to be provided.

The Northgate Plan's requirements for sidewalk width are 12 feet. In several locations, redevelopment with 12-foot sidewalks would improve the overall quality of the streetscape for pedestrian traffic. However, some citizens favor changes that would increase the required sidewalk widths (up to 18 feet), to allow more separation from

vehicle traffic and further improve the pedestrian environment. Eighteen feet is the maximum width of sidewalk required in downtown Seattle, for the areas of highest pedestrian traffic (retail core streets with transit stops). The existing right-of-way widths in Northgate, plus the legal constraints of property rights, tend to discourage the feasibility of wider sidewalk requirements. It is difficult to establish regulatory requirements that force provision of sidewalks on the frontage of private property. Therefore, sidewalks are often provided only in public rights-of-way. However, it should be noted that some new development projects (Men's Wearhouse, Walgreen's, Touchstone et al) in the Northgate area have provided voluntary building setbacks that result in wider-than-minimum sidewalk areas, as a way to meet open space requirements. The benefits of additional sidewalk width in improving the sidewalk environment are noted by this analysis, but it is not clear that any changes to sidewalk width requirements can be accomplished in the short-term, or that changes are needed.

### ***Designations Not Translated to the Land Use Code***

Some citizens have objected because certain pedestrian and street designations were not translated from the Northgate Plan (pages 23, 32 and 53) to the Land Use Code. These include at least the following:

<u><i>Special Landscaped Arterials</i></u>	<u><i>Major Pedestrian Streets</i></u>	<u><i>Other Designations</i></u>
--5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE from 100 <sup>th</sup> -105 <sup>th</sup> Sts. (next to SE portion of Mall)	--Northgate Way, from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Ave. NE	--Class III Blvd. along Meridian Ave./College Way/Wallingford Ave. N.
--Northgate Way from Corliss to Ashworth Ave. N. (west of I-5)		--Type IV Green Streets (primarily street ends near Thornton Creek ravine)
		--Urban Trail location in the Mall's south lot

As documented in the Northgate Plan (pages 71-73), different elements of the Plan were adopted as revisions to the Land Use Code, SEPA policies, Land Use Policies, directives to departments, and one change to a functional transportation plan. Land Use Code revisions included regulatory requirements for improving sidewalks and the streetscape of the Major Pedestrian Street and Special Landscaped Arterials. During the review and adoption process conducted by the City Council, it is likely that the segments not included as Major Pedestrian Streets or Special Landscaped Arterials were deliberately not designated by the Council.

The Class III boulevard designation and the bicycle route designations were defined in the Plan as "policy directives to departments." The effect of this was to direct SEATRAN to consider making changes that would help implement the boulevard and bicycle route designations, but it did not absolutely obligate SEATRAN to make those changes. SEATRAN staff indicated the Class III boulevard request was reviewed, but was not recommended for approval, and the Council chose to not approve the creation of a Class III Boulevard designation.

Type IV Green Streets were not formally recognized in maps in the Land Use Code, and so do not reach the level of regulatory requirement. In effect, the Northgate Plan recognizes the locations where these types of improvements would be suitable (page 53), but does not require developers to provide the improvements. The apparent intent of this type of Green Street was to document suitable locations for street end improvements for public access to the Thornton Creek ravine (and a few other locations with natural features) via public rights-of-way. The recollection of City Council staff is that the Council chose not to translate Type IV Green Streets to regulatory requirements.

During adoption of the Northgate Plan, the Urban Trail designation was recognized as a conceptual expression of the planning committee's wishes of where an Urban Trail might be located. However, this drew opposition from private property owners, and legally the City could not absolutely require that an Urban Trail be provided in a specific location across private property. Therefore, the Urban Trail alignment was not established as a regulatory requirement (see the Open Space section for more about the Urban Trail).

### ***Possible Locations for Additional Street Designations***

Some citizens have indicated that additional streets should be newly considered for Major Pedestrian Streets or Special Landscaped Arterial designation. The suggested locations include at least the following:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE (segments between NE 92<sup>nd</sup> Street and NE 105<sup>th</sup> Street);
- NE 100<sup>th</sup> Street (no sidewalks on north side adjacent to Mall's South Lot); and
- NE 103<sup>rd</sup> Street (between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE).

The north side of NE 100<sup>th</sup> Street has no sidewalks, and pedestrian walkways on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE between NE 92<sup>nd</sup> and NE 97<sup>th</sup> Streets are less-than-ideal. NE 103<sup>rd</sup> Street has adequate sidewalks. These locations, and possibly others, are in need of improvement. It should be recognized that potential changes to street designations bordering the Northgate Mall GDP site likely would not change the improvements required of the current Mall GDP projects (unless the GDP had to be amended in the future). This would negate much of the potential benefit of pursuing designation changes on the streets identified above. On the other hand, adding sidewalk designations to these areas might result in a higher level of pedestrian improvements associated with future light-rail station development.

### ***Prospects for Future Pedestrian Improvements***

Regardless of whether new pedestrian designations are adopted, the City would seek sidewalk and other pedestrian-oriented improvements when new development occurs, to the degree required by the Land Use Code and otherwise indicated by SEPA review of development proposals.

The Financing discussion in the Northgate Plan also indicated that pedestrian improvements could be pursued all at once in larger areas if property owners are willing to establish Local Improvement Districts (LIDs) and pay for a share of improvements

equivalent to the “special benefit” that would accrue to their property (as determined by the assessor). The LID process is initiated by a petition and generally takes 12-18 months to complete.

### ***Curb Cuts***

The requirements of Major Pedestrian Streets are intended to be implemented as new development occurs. As such, the number of curb cuts allowed in new developments along Major Pedestrian Streets (e.g., Northgate Way and a portion of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE) has been a significant concern to citizens interested in reducing pedestrian/vehicle conflicts. The Men’s Wearhouse and Walgreen’s developments obtained variances that allowed them to have two curb cuts, one on each abutting street, despite the lack of more than 300 feet of total street frontage. The Touchstone development was also allowed an exit-only curb cut for vehicles needing ADA-compliant access/egress. DCLU approved the Men’s Wearhouse variance and disapproved the later Walgreen’s variance. Both variance decisions were appealed, and the Hearing Examiner granted the second curb cuts for both developments, due to the potential impacts that would have been generated by circuitous auto access/egress (e.g., traffic passing through residential areas). Also, the Hearing Examiner for the Walgreen’s appeal found that the proposed curb cuts were fewer than the number present for previous uses. Both developments are on corner lots with busy streets, and in both cases the total frontage is close to 300 feet, which if exceeded, would have allowed more than one curb cut outright. The 300-foot criterion was defined by the Northgate Plan. These decisions appear to have set a precedent for corner lots that weakens the goal of reducing pedestrian/vehicle conflicts and creating a better pedestrian environment. On the other hand, the decisions tend to support the objective of protecting residential areas from commercially-oriented pass-through traffic.

### **SPO Recommendations**

- **Re-examine the locations of the Major Pedestrian Street and Special Landscaped Arterial designations, to decide if certain street segments should be added to the current designations.**
- **Work with citizens and City departments to identify and prioritize opportunities for potential publicly- or privately-funded pedestrian improvement projects.**

This function could be provided by the Neighborhood Development Manager (NDM) for the Northeast Sector.

- **This analysis proposes no changes to the Northgate Plan or Land Use Code regarding curb cuts.**

The curb cut distance criterion (one per 300 feet) is sensible and should be retained. It could be very difficult to amend the Code to prevent future variances from being granted, but these would likely only be approvable on corner lots.

## **Policy 9 – Parking**

### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 9 states, “*Manage parking supply, location and demand to discourage the use of single occupant vehicles, and to improve short-term parking accessibility for retail customers, patients, and visitors, without undermining transit or HOV usage, or detracting from the creation of an attractive pedestrian environment.*” The five implementation guidelines discuss:

- minimum and maximum parking requirements;
- certain exceptions to parking requirements;
- controlling the amount of surface parking;
- a floor area ratio (FAR) for structured parking; and
- developing a public parking garage in the core area, with administration of planning, construction and operation of the garage by a parking commission that would include representatives of Northgate area property owners, developers, employers and residents.

### **Actions to Date**

The extensive parking regulatory provisions contained in the implementation guidelines under this policy were adopted in the Northgate Overlay District, SMC 23.71 of the Land Use Code, and are applied to development proposals. The Northgate Mall GDP and the Touchstone development both include plans to provide parking garages and/or underground parking.

### **Discussion (I.G. 9.1 – 9.5)**

Development proposals within the Northgate Overlay District were reviewed according to the parking requirements in SMC 23.71. DCLU is obligated to verify that development proposals are consistent with parking requirements, and require changes where necessary.

A comparison of parking requirements indicates that the Northgate Plan base parking requirements are relatively similar to the general parking requirements, but with maximum parking limits, and options to reduce the amount of parking. For example, the base parking requirement for general retail uses outside Northgate is one space per 350 square feet of commercial space (2.86 spaces per 1,000 square feet), while the Northgate base minimum parking requirement for commercial retail sales uses is 0.93 long-term space per 1,000 square feet and 2 short-term spaces per 1,000 square feet. SMC 23.71 provides a few opportunities to reduce this base requirement, allows shared parking arrangements, establishes maximum parking amounts for retail and office uses, accommodates structured parking and allows a payment in lieu of some parking provision. These requirements provide some flexibility in parking arrangements and ensure that parking is not oversupplied. As an example, the Walgreen’s store provided 33 parking spaces for 15,128 square feet of building area, which translates to



approximately 2.2 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet, less than the base requirement, probably due to waivers in SMC 23.71.

If agreed by the mall owner and METRO, garages on the south lot of the mall property would accommodate roughly 500-1,000 transit-related parking spaces supplementing the existing Northgate Transit Center parking, that would replace the existing 500-space park-and-ride lot capacity at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE facility. If the Mall GDP does not proceed, this arrangement likely could not occur, because the garages would be built to serve the GDP development, and secondarily accommodate the METRO parking. These projects would contribute to the intent of the plan's parking policy by allowing higher-density development, concentrating transit facilities, increasing parking efficiency, and freeing up space for a park at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE park-and-ride site.

A lot of land is still devoted to parking. The types of uses (pharmacy, grocery store, men's clothing store, all in single-use structures) provided by new development still retain a dependence upon automobile traffic to capture most of their business. With future redevelopment to higher-density uses, the amount of land devoted solely to parking should decline because more parking will be provided in garages. This is a long-term process that will be driven by private redevelopment proposals, and regulated by the requirements incorporated in the Northgate Plan and Land Use Code.

The Northgate Plan contains an implementation guideline recommending development of a public parking garage in the core area. This is intended to be a long-term strategy for accommodating employee parking, encouraging transit and carpooling, and reducing the amount of parking provided by new development in the core. This strategy included the possibility of in-lieu contributions of funds by developers toward a new garage, creation of a business assessment district, a bond issue, and formation of a parking commission to facilitate development of the garage.

Since Northgate Plan adoption, there was no progress on a public parking garage project, likely due to: complexity of the project; probable lack of perceived need by business owners; lack of impetus by business owners and public; and subsequent lack of prioritization by the City. A parking commission has not been established. As discussed in the Northgate Plan, the commission would have two types of responsibilities: to recommend a location, design and financing strategy for a garage; and to administer the construction and operation of the facility. Both responsibilities would be complex in nature, but the administration of garage construction and operation is potentially very complex and could involve the City in extensive long-term management and/or funding obligations. Significant financial, siting, and organizational issues would also need to be addressed to better define the commission's responsibilities and the feasibility of a public parking garage.

Some citizens have suggested that Policy 9 contains conflicting goals, in that it continues to accommodate parking for single-occupant vehicles rather than taking more radical steps to foster transit or high-occupancy vehicle usage. There does appear to be a philosophical conflict in the policy due to the competing aims of providing on-site

parking and promoting transit usage. However, the policy is realistic in that it recognizes the likelihood that automobiles will continue to play a role in transporting people to and from the area, and thus parking will continue to be needed. This policy and its guidelines attempted to make changes that would lessen the emphasis on surface parking and reduce the negative aesthetic impacts generated by large surface parking lots. Rather than rely only on regulatory parking limitations, the Northgate Plan also promotes transit service improvements and requires transportation management plans (TMPs) for new developments as a more direct way to encourage greater use of transit and carpool options.

### **SPO Recommendations**

- **Revisit parking requirements of the Northgate Plan to see if adjustments are advisable to further limit the allowable amount of parking.**

Potential reductions in minimum parking requirements may result in fewer parking spaces provided with new development, and encourage greater use of transit for retail trips, over the long term.

- **Do not establish a parking commission at this time.**

A public parking garage has not been identified by citizens as a priority for near-term implementation. The possible complexities of setting up a parking commission, and the potential long-term management or funding obligations that could ensue, weigh against pursuing this recommendation. Over the long term, the garage concept may become more attractive, and could be pursued in the future.

## **Policy 10 – Vehicular Circulation and Neighborhood Traffic Controls**

### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 10 states, *“Reduce the impact of increases in traffic volume by minimizing conflicts with local access streets, and improving traffic flow, circulation and safety, without increasing vehicular capacity.”* The four implementation guidelines discuss:

- improving HOV access;
- I-5 on-ramp improvements;
- improving arterial traffic flow and operations; and
- directing traffic circulation to arterials to protect neighborhoods from intrusive traffic.

### **Traffic Trends and Actions to Date**

#### ***Summary of Traffic Volume Trends, 1988-1998***

According to available data, average weekday daily traffic volumes in the Northgate planning area grew in some locations but in others were less than recorded in 1988. The east-west NE 130<sup>th</sup> Street corridor experienced the greatest percentage growth in average weekday traffic volumes, while the Northgate Way corridor experienced modest growth, and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, Roosevelt Way, and 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE had traffic growth at some intersections but not others (see Figure 6). Table 3-4 summarizes available traffic volume data for average weekday traffic and PM peak hour traffic volumes. See Appendix E for more detailed traffic information, including graphics showing 1988 traffic volumes.

The trends in PM peak hour traffic volumes are similar to those described for the average weekday traffic volumes except most growth at specific locations was of a lesser magnitude (in percentage terms) than the daily volumes (see Figure 7). The low growth or decline in peak hour traffic volumes at several locations does not address whether there has been “peak spreading” (congested conditions extending over a longer period of time than in the past). The peak hour data appear to indicate greater percentage traffic growth in the reverse of peak commuting directions (see Appendix E for details). For example, at Northgate Way/Roosevelt Way, southbound PM peak hour traffic volumes in 1997 were approximately 30 percent greater than in 1988, while northbound volumes were approximately 38 percent less than in 1988.

The City’s 1994 Comprehensive Plan indicated that with predicted growth, the 2010 PM peak hour traffic would not cause violation of the City’s level of service standards at screenlines measuring north-south and east-west traffic through North Seattle. Quantitative traffic analysis for the City’s Comprehensive Plan indicated that roads are predicted to be able to accommodate traffic volumes in 2010 with acceptable levels of congestion. Two smaller screenlines within the Northgate area also support that conclusion. Given the available traffic data, it can be inferred that sufficient road capacity continues to be present in the Northgate vicinity.

**Figure 6**  
**Average Weekday Traffic and changes since 1988**

**Figure 7**  
**PM Peak Hour Traffic and changes since 1988**

**Table 3-4**  
**Total Approaching Traffic Volumes and Percent Change in Volumes Since 1988**

Intersection	Average Weekday Total Approaching Volumes		PM Peak Hour Total Approaching Volumes	
	Latest Recorded Volumes ('95-'98)	Percent Change Since 1988	Latest Recorded Volumes ('95-'98)	Percent Change Since 1988
<b><u>Northgate Way Corridor</u></b>				
Northgate Way/Meridian Ave. N.	46,113	-2%	3,503	-5%
Northgate Way/1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. NE	58,749	3%	4,527	-3%
Northgate Way/5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE	43,518	0.1%	3,525	-10%
Northgate Way/Roosevelt Way NE	40,030	15%	3,532	8%
Northgate Way/15 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE	24,754	6%	2,183	0.3%
<b><u>NE 130<sup>th</sup>/125<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor</u></b>				
NE 130 <sup>th</sup> St./1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. NE	33,304	20%	2,754	5%
NE 130 <sup>th</sup> St./5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/ Roos. Wy	37,228	20%	2,956	1%
NE 125 <sup>th</sup> St./ Roosevelt Way	25,821	7%	2,034	-2%
NE 125 <sup>th</sup> St./15 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE	38,451	-2%	3,688	-4%
<b><u>5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE Corridor</u></b>				
5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/NE 130 <sup>th</sup> St.	37,228	20%	2,956	1%
5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/Northgate Way	43,518	0.1%	3,525	-10%
5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/ NE 103 <sup>rd</sup> St.	16,762	-5%	1,666	-16%
5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/NE 100 <sup>th</sup> St.	13,875	7%	1,398	2%
<b><u>Roosevelt Way Corridor</u></b>				
NE 125 <sup>th</sup> St./ Roosevelt Way	25,821	7%	2,034	-2%
Northgate Wy/Roosevelt Wy	40,030	15%	3,532	8%
Pinehurst Way (thru only)	9,908	-12%	998	-15%
<b><u>NE 100<sup>th</sup>/103<sup>rd</sup> Sts. Vicinity</u></b>				
NE 100 <sup>th</sup> St./1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. NE	13,218	39%	1,229	20%
NE 103 <sup>rd</sup> St./1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. NE	16,279	3%	1,394	-3%
NE 100 <sup>th</sup> St./5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE	13,875	7%	1,398	2%
NE 103 <sup>rd</sup> St./5 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE	16,762	-5%	1,666	-16%
<b><u>15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE Corridor</u></b>				
15 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/NE 125 <sup>th</sup> St.	38,451	-2%	3,688	-4%
15 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/Northgate Way	24,754	6%	2,183	0.3%
15 <sup>th</sup> Ave. NE/NE 117 <sup>th</sup> St (northbound approach only)	3,965	-1%	581	-9%

Source: City of Seattle automatic traffic count data.

Note: Volumes include data collected primarily in 1998 and 1997, but also in 1996 and 1995 for certain locations. See Appendix E for more detailed information, including directional traffic volumes.

***Interstate 5 On-Ramp and HOV Access Improvements (I.G. 10.1 and 10.2)***

The I-5 northbound on-ramp at NE 107<sup>th</sup> Street has been completed, and westbound left turns from Northgate Way at 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE have been eliminated. These actions improved traffic flow at 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way, and represent progress in implementing the Northgate Plan. HOV lane improvements indicated in the Northgate Plan for 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way have not occurred.

SEATRAN is conducting an improvement project for Northgate Way between Meridian Avenue N. and 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, to upgrade the signal system, provide emergency vehicle pre-emption, and paving improvements. This project is primarily oriented toward congestion relief and safety.

***Neighborhood Traffic Controls (I.G. 10.4)***

Existing neighborhood traffic controls, including traffic circles, restricted access in one direction, and chicanes are present in several locations, especially in Maple Leaf, but also in Aurora-Licton and Haller Lake portions of the Northgate planning area. These controls help slow vehicle speeds at intersections and partially restrict, but do not prevent, general automobile access to residential areas.

Two street improvements planned to be constructed in 2000 will promote better protection of a neighborhood from through traffic, and directly respond to Northgate Plan requests in I.G. 10.4.F. A cul-de-sac eliminating access from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE to NE 115<sup>th</sup> Street, will be provided by the Touchstone development north of the mall. This will eliminate through traffic on NE 115<sup>th</sup> Street to/from newer senior housing and multifamily housing on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE. Also, the new one-block NE 112<sup>th</sup> Street will be constructed in 2000, adjacent to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE park-and-ride lot and Touchstone development. These improvements will avoid the adverse impacts of additional through-traffic that would have resulted within a single-family residential area. City staff helped plan this improvement and coordinated funds from a past \$98,000 mitigation payment as well as City funds.

The Northgate Plan listed several specific streets and street segments for neighborhood traffic control improvements. On these streets, SEATRAN noted the existence of four traffic circles and two non-arterial traffic signs on Ashworth Avenue N., several chicanes and traffic circles along NE 115<sup>th</sup> Street, two traffic circles on a segment of NE 107<sup>th</sup> Street, four traffic circles on 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE, one traffic circle on a segment of Pinehurst Way, installation of asphalt walkways on one side of N. 122<sup>nd</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Street in the Haller Lake area, and three sets of chicanes and a traffic circle on a segment of NE 98<sup>th</sup> Street. Some of these devices were installed prior to 1993, as mitigation for the Northgate Transit Center (according to anecdotal comments). SEATRAN also noted their cooperation over the past four years with the Maple Leaf neighborhood through the Neighborhood Street Fund process to install traffic calming devices, including chicanes and traffic circles at locations identified by the Maple Leaf Community Council. As part

of the Mall GDP mitigation, a curb bulb would be provided on NE 95<sup>th</sup> Street at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE (although the GDP approval is being challenged). Also, SEATRAN notes that, as requested in the Northgate Plan, Goodwin Way was re-designated from an arterial to a local access street.

According to SEATRAN staff, over the past several years a relatively high number of neighborhood traffic control devices have been installed in the Maple Leaf area.

## **Discussion**

### ***Arterial Flow and Operations Issues***

Concern about arterial traffic congestion was the genesis of the Northgate Plan planning effort, and it remains one of the central issues affecting the area. Arterials in the Northgate area serve traffic generated by local businesses and residents, but also traffic passing through to and from surrounding areas. The intent of Policy 10 represents a challenging objective to achieve, namely that that traffic impacts can be reduced, impacts on local streets avoided, and traffic flows, circulation and safety improved without increasing the capacity of the arterial streets to handle traffic. Achievement of this objective relies on the long-term transformation of the area to better support pedestrian travel, use of transportation management measures, and more accessible high-capacity transit systems, thereby moderating automobile traffic demands.

Has progress been made in meeting the intent of Policy 10? The available traffic data indicate that arterial traffic volumes have, so far, not increased as much as was expected by past traffic studies (in the EIS for the Northgate Plan). The data do not support a finding of unacceptable traffic congestion, or exceedance of the overall capacity of the road network. Also, more transit service is available and transportation management measures are being required of most substantial development.

The available traffic data illustrate that traffic growth is not necessarily steady and inevitable, but is influenced by numerous factors related to residential and commercial growth patterns, and individual choices of routes and modes of travel. The data may reflect, for example, a pattern of some motorists choosing alternate routes to avoid congested streets in the Northgate area. The data may also reflect a spreading of commuting traffic over a longer period of time, resulting in little or no growth in peak hour volumes but an extended period of heavier volumes (however, this has not been confirmed). Planned and anticipated growth in the core, such as the Touchstone project and Northgate Mall expansion, is expected to counteract the trends of slow traffic growth or declines in traffic volumes for some segments of the Northgate road system.

### ***Northgate Plan's Policy Position on Future Expansions of Road Capacity (I.G. 10.3)***

The Northgate Plan's dedication to favoring non-automobile-oriented solutions led it to minimize the role of traffic/roadway improvements in helping to resolve specific traffic flow and capacity issues. However, the Northgate Plan did not completely avoid



recommending improvements to road capacity. I.G. 10.3 recommends several specific improvements that would increase road capacity, including:

- A. Construct operational and capital improvements as needed to mitigate impacts resulting from new westbound through or left-turn vehicle trips added to the intersection of Fifth Avenue NE and NE Northgate Way.
- B. Construct left-turn pockets on all four legs of the N. 130<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue NE intersection.
- C. Construct a northbound left-turn pocket on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE at Northgate Way.
- D. Install a signal and geometric improvements at the intersection of Pinehurst Way NE and Roosevelt Way NE.
- E. At the intersection of NE 117<sup>th</sup> Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and Pinehurst Way, eliminate through and left turn traffic on NE 117<sup>th</sup> Street.
- F. To accommodate turning movements associated with substantial development, an eastbound right-turn lane should be constructed along Northgate Way (between First and Fifth Avenues NE).

Of these, left-turn pockets at N. 130<sup>th</sup> St./First Avenue NE, are scheduled to occur in 2000, and intersection improvements at Pinehurst Way and Roosevelt Way NE have already occurred. Improvements C and E represent relatively modest improvements in capacity, but improvements A and F represent somewhat larger commitments to increasing the road capacity at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way and for the segment of Northgate Way between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE. The planned improvements related to the Northgate Mall GDP will include a right-turn lane between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE, and a right-turn lane just west of the Mall access at 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE will remain.

The Northgate Plan's inclusion of certain road capacity improvements moderates the anti-road-expansion position in its policy language. As such, the Northgate Plan should not be perceived as automatically opposed to any road capacity improvements in the Northgate vicinity. The wording of improvement A implies that operational and/or capacity improvements would be needed at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way as a result of substantial development, and that the developers causing the impacts should be responsible to mitigate them. Traffic mitigation improvements were required as conditions of approval for the Mall GDP and Touchstone development proposals. DCLU identified several signalization improvements, a small amount of additional needed right-of-way and at least three right or left turn-lane improvements at the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way intersection to mitigate both of these developments. To fulfill improvement F of the Northgate Plan, DCLU required right-turn lane improvements, as noted above.

#### ***Other Requested Road Improvement Projects***

Of the projects identified above, improvements C and E have not yet been implemented.

For improvement C, a northbound left-turn pocket on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE at Northgate Way, SEATLAN indicates that additional right-of-way would need to be purchased to provide left-turn pockets.

For improvement E, reconfiguration of an angled intersection to eliminate through movements on NE 117<sup>th</sup> Street across Pinehurst Way, SEATLAN indicates that a “neighborhood traffic plan” would need to be completed to illustrate the diversion and a petition circulated to nearby affected residents to show support for the reconfiguration. This is a process used by SEATLAN to consider the ramifications of closures on nearby residents.

### ***Left-Turn Prohibition Issues (I.G. 10.3)***

Under Policy 10 of the Northgate Plan is the statement that “*Left-turn access onto or off of Northgate Way shall be prohibited between Meridian Avenue N. and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.*” This guideline has generated uncertainties and confusion, expressed in a variety of public comments, regarding the Plan’s intent.

The Plan text (I.G. 10.3.A, page 47) discusses the prohibition in reference to *substantial development* (new development projects), and also specifies the issue as vehicular access *from and to private property*. This guideline is intended to prevent conflicting left-turn movements at mid-block locations that would interfere with through traffic flows on Northgate Way. This is conceptually sensible because new development should not be allowed to contribute to conflicting traffic movements at unsignalized locations. Right-turn-only access or access via north-south public streets are the most preferable access methods for minimizing conflicting movements.

Northgate Way (except between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues NE) is configured with a center left-turn lane usable by both eastbound and westbound traffic to access many existing businesses. The Plan text does not say that the center left-turn lane on Northgate Way should be removed. Because the center left turn lane is present, left-turn vehicle access to *existing businesses* is allowed. Prohibiting such access could be detrimental to the economic viability of many small businesses, and potentially could have traffic operations impacts in some locations. At the time of adoption of the Northgate Plan, SEATLAN’s position was that restricting all left-turn movements might not be necessary, and that in order to restrict all left turns, a physical device (“c-curb”) would probably be needed.

The left-turn prohibition guideline is interpreted to not apply to left turns at *signalized intersections*, because at these locations, movements are controlled by traffic signals and do not conflict with through traffic. At 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way, the intersection will be reconfigured to allow east-to-north left turns, and allow left turns from the Mall property to westbound Northgate Way. Not prohibiting left turns from the Mall property might be interpreted as contrary to the intent of this guideline. However, this location is already a signalized public intersection and already allows left-turns from the Mall property.

Over the long-term, the City might determine that a different street configuration (e.g., without the center left-turn lane) on Northgate Way would better accommodate traffic volumes and lessen congestion. However, much more analysis of future traffic flows and the street network would be necessary to support such a significant change in road configuration.

#### ***Neighborhood Traffic Control Issues (I.G. 10.4)***

Control of traffic impacts on neighborhoods near the core is one of the most important issues with local citizens. The amount of traffic generated by the commercial area and pass-through traffic on these local streets is a significant concern to many citizens. Relatively little traffic data are available to evaluate the amount or significance of the actual traffic volumes on local streets. A majority of local residential streets in the vicinity do not have sidewalk improvements, and paved portions of streets are often narrow. This creates the potential for vehicle-pedestrian accidents, as people frequently walk on the streets rather than shoulders, which accommodate residential parking and open ditches in some locations. A different sort of neighborhood traffic issue expressed by one citizen is difficulty for side-street drivers to enter arterials (such as Northgate Way and 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE) due to infrequent gaps in traffic.

Some citizens have questioned the level of progress in providing neighborhood traffic controls discussed in the Northgate Plan. They indicate that SEPA authority has not been used to require neighborhood traffic controls with new development, and that there is still need for more neighborhood traffic controls in the Maple Leaf neighborhood. The lack of use of SEPA authority specifically for neighborhood traffic controls reflects City staff judgements on traffic impacts for the development proposals to date. If project-related traffic cannot be reasonably predicted to occur on neighborhood streets in significant amounts, significant impacts cannot be established and mitigation cannot be required. Despite lack of use to date, it is possible this SEPA authority could be used in the future, depending upon the specific location and type of future development proposed.

There are undoubtedly other improvements that can be implemented. SEATRAN and DON staff will continue to work with neighborhoods in the Northgate planning area to identify further neighborhood traffic controls that can be implemented over time, to further achieve the intent of the Northgate Plan. These projects will need to compete for prioritization with the needs of other neighborhoods seeking additional traffic controls.

#### **SPO Recommendations**

- **Evaluate the priority of intersection improvements at 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE/Northgate Way and Pinehurst Way/NE 117<sup>th</sup> Street. The NDM for the Northeast Sector and SEATRAN should assist citizens in preparing a neighborhood traffic plan and petition to implement the latter improvement.**
- **SEATRAN staff should continue to coordinate with neighborhood representatives and the NDM to implement additional neighborhood traffic**

**controls that are deemed suitable by SEATRAN. Citizens should identify specific locations and desired traffic calming devices for SEATRAN to evaluate.**

## **Policy 11 – Status of High-Capacity Transit Station**

### **Summary of Policy**

Policy 11 states, “*Development of a high-capacity transit station shall be designed to minimize impacts on surrounding neighborhoods by emphasizing non-motorized access, transit-supportive land uses, and an attractive pedestrian environment at and near the station.*” The three implementation guidelines discuss:

- concentrating substantial development within the Northgate core (within ¼ mile of the station) with adequate intensity to support frequent transit service;
- encouraging pedestrian access to the transit station by creating an attractive, safe pedestrian environment; and
- ensuring the transit station will be accessible to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.

### **Actions to Date**

Development of a high-capacity transit station is not assured at this time due to funding uncertainties. However, Sound Transit and various governments, including Seattle, are committed to have the light rail system reach Northgate in Phase I (by approximately 2008). Station area planning was initiated in Spring 2000. The station location is between the existing Northgate Transit Center and Interstate 5, between NE 100<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Streets.

### **Discussion**

Given the uncertainties, it is premature to evaluate progress toward meeting the intent of this policy. However, a few observations can be made.

#### ***Concentration of Development***

I.G. 11.1 encourages concentration of development in the Northgate core, including new mixed-use development, commuter-oriented retail services, and midrise zones with 85-foot height limits. Refer to Chapter 2 for discussion of growth trends. Including proposed mall-related growth, other ongoing projects and future growth, the development pattern in the Northgate core area will continue to become denser. This will help support even more transit demand, and perhaps, service availability than is already present. Provision of a light-rail station at the Northgate Transit Center would greatly increase the attractiveness of street-level commercial uses in the station vicinity.

#### ***Accessibility***

Pedestrian improvements providing connections to the expected light rail station site are proposed in the Mall GDP, and planning for a light-rail station would further consider pedestrian improvements on nearby streets. Other improvements provided through light-

rail station development might include a pedestrian crossing of I-5, if funding is available for this purpose.

Future planning will be necessary to determine possible accessibility improvements to the light-rail station for the benefit of nearby residents. Similarly, future planning will determine what if any additional neighborhood traffic controls can be provided to address effects of commuter traffic. The City is engaging in a station area planning process in 2000 to better define how the station can best fit into the vicinity.

If Sound Transit is not able to secure funding to construct a light-rail station at Northgate, the benefits to the area, in terms of high-capacity transit service improvements and land use implications, would be delayed. Existing express-oriented transit service using the Northgate Transit Center would still be present, providing some but not all of the capacity light-rail service would provide.

#### **SPO Recommendations**

- **As part of station area planning and subsequent light rail project development, plan for improvements that will facilitate pedestrian and transit access from the neighborhoods, and control traffic/parking impacts on nearby areas, per the Northgate Plan.**